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ABSTRACT

This study attempted to identify the criteria educational administrators use when selecting individuals for promotion. Researchers compared "operative criteria" (those actually used) with "posted criteria" (those espoused). Interviews were conducted with 92 school administrators. Brown's Form PROM, derived from Kelly's role construct repertory grid, was the instrument used. Administrators were asked to list general criteria important in selecting employees for promotion and then criteria they had actually used in selecting individuals for promotion. The most important criteria to emerge were (1) perceptiveness and intelligence, (2) self-others orientation, (3) decision-making skills, and (4) innovation and flexibility. Findings indicate that administrators in more senior positions use cognitively more complex structures for discrimination among persons and moreover, that those using more complex structures make more valid decisions, at least in so far as their operative criteria are congruent with their posted criteria. Finally, it is suggested that fairer and more valid decisions might be made if administrators participate in activities that help make them more aware of and increase the complexity of their own criteria (such as the use of Brown's form PROM). (Author/JM)

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DYNAMICS OF PROMOTION DECISIONS

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For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south, But God is the judge ...

King David

Man looks at his world through transparent patterns of templets which he creates and then attempts to fit over the realities of which the world is composed ...

George Kelly

Yon Cassius has a lean and hungry look ... such men are dangerous ...

William Shakespeare

... the Variations have amused me because I've labelled 'em with the nicknames of my particular friends. ... I have written what I think they would have written - if they were asses enough to compose - it's a quaint idea and the result is amusing to those behind the scenes and won't affect the hearer who nose nuffin'.

Edward Elgar

... Understandings and interpretations of values inherent in traditions of practice can have direct import for policy decisions.

Jack Culbertson

... administration constitutes a complexification whose ... content is never value-free but always more than objective. This subjectivity ... imports a dualism between value and fact, between what *is* and what *ought* to be.

Chris Hodgkinson

DYNAMICS OF PROMOTION DECISIONS

A presentation by Dr. Elizabeth Ann Rix, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Toronto, 371 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Canada, M5S 2R7 for discussion at Session 45.10 of the 1981 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Los Angeles, California, April 13-17.

In a recent promotion decision - the headlines of the paper proclaimed him to be a calculated risk, an unlikely candidate, decent academic credentials, only 37 years old, less than three years administrative experience. So one wonders, what made the board of directors overlook his obvious shortcomings? One board member answers for us that their choice "is an amalgam of theory and practice." Another's words were: "I think we were looking for someone with vigor and vision ... energy and imagination to work out a good future. We were looking for a leader in the sense of someone to develop a strategy for making necessary changes."

Whether the person they selected was the right choice, the best choice or even a good choice will be decipherable five years from now, maybe sooner. In attempting to understand the process of this personnel decision one could study the recorded criteria which can readily be found for various positions such as a principalship, superintendency or a presidency as in the example above. Culbertson (1981) in his discussion of the hermeneutical epistomological approach to the study of educational

administration provides another access for understanding the personnel decision process and suggests gaining an understanding and interpretation of the values inherent in traditions of practice. On the other hand, one could attempt to understand the process of this personnel decision by studying the values and beliefs - the interpersonal perceptions of the decision makers themselves. Many recent studies have emphasized a need for what Cronback (1958) calls study of the perceiver's cognitive maps about other people. In social psychological terminology this would be similar to understanding the phenomenological world of the perceiver. In this paper it will be referred to as *psychological dynamics of promotion decisions*.

The Inescapable Inevitability of the Intrusion of Values

The intrusion of values into the decision-making process, states Hodgkinson (1978) is not merely inevitable, it is the very substance of decision. Identifying the psychological realities that administrators see when they consider an individual for promotion formed the basis of the study. It was acknowledged that several factors influence promotion decisions such as formal-legal requirements, demographic characteristics, and "enabling conditions" that allow individuals to identify themselves as candidates for promotion. But the factor most subjective in nature is the set of conditions having to do with the perceptions in the minds of the decision-makers - to be referred to as *tacit* or *operative* criteria. In identifying the psychological dynamics involved in promotion decisions the content of the criteria were examined. Using Brown's Personnel Decision Analysis: Form PROM, a projective process derived from Kelly's role construct

repertory grid, it became possible to elicit the content of the criteria, the perceptions in the minds of decision-makers when they are concerned about whom to promote. This is what administrators in a typical Ontario School think about when they are confronted with the need to recommend individuals for promotion.

TABLE 1

TACIT/OPERATIVE CRITERIA

N = 100

Apparent Shifts in Priorities from

Pretest to Posttest

	February	October	
Leadership Ability	1	1	Perceptiveness & Intelligence
Innovation and Flexibility	2	2	Self-others Orientation
Decision-Making Skills	3	3	Decision-Making Skills
Self-others Orientation	4	4	Innovation and Flexibility
Commitment and Drive	5	5	Leadership Ability
Rapport with Administration	6	6	Emotional Stability
Emotional Stability	7	7	Social Dexterity-Friendliness
Organizing Ability	8	8	Communication Skills
Perceptiveness and Intelligence	9	9	Rapport with Community
Rapport with Teachers	10	10	Commitment & Drive
Professional Experience	11	11	Organizing Ability
Rapport with Students	12	12	Dynamic Personality
Dynamic Personality	13	13	Rapport with Teachers
Teaching Effectiveness	14	14	Rapport with Administration
Social Dexterity-Friendliness	15	15	Teaching Effectiveness
Professional Knowledge and Growth	16	16	Professional Experience
Communication Skills	17	17	Prof. Knowledge and Growth
Age and Appearance	18	18	Rapport with Students
Rapport with Community	19	19	Age and Appearance
Sex and Marital Status	20	20	Sex and Marital Status

The criteria in Table 1 represent the administrator's collective values and illustrate how over time these values changed. As can be observed in the chart changes were in the form of shifts: some criteria became more important, some became less important while others remained relatively the same in value. Of most importance to the administrators were: perceptiveness and intelligence, self-others orientation, decision-making skills and innovation and flexibility. These emerged as highest in importance following a series of workshops intended to expand and extend the administrators' construct of promotable/nonpromotable. A congruency model (Table 2) used for measuring the administrators' use of the general cognitive structure validated the structure itself against actual promotion recommendations made by the administrators.

Explanation of the Model for Congruency

The model was used to check for congruency/incongruency in three ways: column one was compared with column two, with column three, and with column four. If, for a particular administrator column one was found to be congruent with column two, then column two received a "C" for congruency; if, however, column one was not congruent with column two, then column two received an "INC" for incongruency. The same procedure was followed in examining congruency/incongruency with columns three and four in relation to column one. The content for analysis using the model was obtained through interviewing 94 administrators (94%) during which each person was asked the following: "Have you recommended anyone for promotion or encouraged anyone to apply for promotion?" If the response was "Yes", a second question was asked: "Can you tell me about the characteristics you perceive or perceived

TABLE 2

A MODEL FOR ANALYSIS:

VALIDATION/INVALIDATION OF OPERATIVE CRITERIA THROUGH CONGRUENCY/INCONGRUENCY

Identification of Criteria	criteria *individually* developed	criteria *individually* reported	criteria *collectively* developed	criteria *administratively* developed
Source of Criteria	completed PROM Forms October posttests	stated criteria used in recommendations	20 Halton criteria - the "peer norm" through analysis following workshops	posted list of 15 of the 20 collectively developed criteria
Where and when Criteria Obtained:	PROM Forms: October 1976 (posttests)	Interviews: Field Notes April and May 1978	See page 68 entitled: "Apparent Shifts" Nov. 1976	See page 6o entitled: "Candidate Profile Form" Nov. 1977
Pattern 1	-	C*	C	C
Pattern 2	-	C	C	INC
Pattern 3	-	C	INC	INC
Pattern 4	-	C	INC	C
Pattern 5	-	INC**	C	C
Pattern 6	-	INC	INC	C
Pattern 7	-	INC	C	INC
Pattern 8	-	INC	INC	INC

*C = Congruency

**INC = Incongruency

that that person has or had that made you come to the conclusion that here was a person you felt you would recommend or encourage for promotion?" The interview was used for identifying the administrators' PROM Forms, which up until this point were anonymous. Each administrator's PROM Forms and interview content were examined separately and then the results were reported collectively.

The model was designed to test for validation/invalidation of the administrator's behaviour, that is, to see if the operative criteria the administrator had developed were the actual criteria used when making a recommendation for promotion.

By comparing the first column (each administrator's individually developed criteria on the October 1976 Form PROM) with the second column (information received from that administrator during the 1978 interview), one would be able to determine the percentage of congruency. (The patterns simply represent all possible combinations of the four sets of criteria: criteria individually developed, individually reported, collectively developed, and administratively developed.) For example, if most of the administrators were found to represent any of patterns 1, 2, 3 or 4, one could conclude that there was evidence that the administrators' constructs had been validated.

If, however, most of the administrators represented patterns 5, 6, 7 or 8, one could conclude that there was little evidence that the administrators' behaviour had received validation. In none of these patterns is there congruency between columns one and two, indicating that the criteria on the administrator's Form PROM were dissimilar to those used by the same administrator in reference to a specific person recommended

for promotion.

A major finding of the study was that administrators in more senior positions in the hierarchy use cognitively more complex structures for discriminating among persons for promotion than do administrators in lower positions. Further, it was found that the complexity of cognitive structures in administrators increases the validity of their promotion decisions. Table 3 illustrates that among those who made formal recommendations, 71% had operative criteria - the criteria they had developed during workshops - that remained the same when they later made an official recommendation of a person for promotion. Collectively, this was validated in the study. The greatest discrepancy in the total number of constructs or ways of thinking about people existed between elementary and secondary principals. In every case, those who used fewer than the average of nine constructs were elementary school principals.

Course of Development

The study illustrates (1) that it is possible to identify the psychological dynamics or realities of administrators, that is, the content in the minds of decision-makers, and (2) implied that promotion decisions are likely to be fairer and more valid if the administrator making those decisions has a relatively complex cognitive structure. Developing or training administrators so that their psychological constructs relating to whom they would/would not promote requires expanding or extending the construct promotable/nonpromotable. Brown's Form PROM, mentioned earlier, has functioned as a catalyst in a process for assisting people at all levels of the educational system for understanding the

TABLE 3

GROUPING OF FINDINGS OF CONGRUENCY BETWEEN PROTOCOL CRITERIA AND CRITERIA ACTUALLY USED FOR PROMOTION

N = 63 but became

N of 48 administrators with identified posttest (individually developed criteria) and participation in the interview process relating to validation/invalidation of operative criteria.*

		Number of Administrators	Percentage of Administrators	
Clear Indicators of Behavioural Validity	Examples of Pattern 1:	21	44%	
	Examples of Pattern 2:	10	21%	71%
	Examples of Pattern 3:	3	6%	
	Examples of Pattern 4:	0	0%	
Poor Indicators of Behavioural Validity	Examples of Pattern 5:	3	6%	
	Examples of Pattern 6:	0	0%	29%
	Examples of Pattern 7:	1	2%	
	Examples of Pattern 8:	10	21%	
	Total	48	100%	

Note: * The revised N is 48 administrators because 12 of the administrators who identified their posttest and participated in the interview, replied "no" to the question which asked "Have you recommended anyone for promotion?" The data from two other administrators who replied "yes" to the same question, were not included in the analysis because of vacillating between the prononoun "he" and "she" when speaking about a specific person, and in the other case, when asked if they had recommended anyone for promotion, they vacillated from "no" to "yes."

psychological constructs used in making personnel decisions. Marked and administratively significant change in principals' criteria followed (a) alertness of one's own constructs, (b) interpersonal alertness of constructs of individual colleagues, (c) alertness of collective constructs of one's own and other groups, and (d) the contrast with stated *oughts*.

I. Alertness and Personal Change: Some Possibilities and Some Problems

The projective instrumentation alerts one to or makes one aware of one's own tact/operative criteria. At that point there exists a potential for alteration. One can deny that the constructs that emerged do not validly represent one's cognitive constructs, that is, what one really thinks about when making personnel decisions. Or, one can upon reflection and continuous circling back and forth between one's operative criteria and one's stated *oughts*, reorder one's priorities. The process of reflection or reconstruction in which it is possible for one to reorder one's priorities is the realization that one's construct system was not satisfactory - that one's construct system is not sufficiently systematic to be useful as a basis for anticipation. Instead, one may have had a few rules or constructs which were held stringently. Earlier studies illustrate that one tends to retain the same constructs but comes to think differently about the importance of these same constructs. If it is assumed that people are dynamic than one's psychological constructs will be active and reveal alteration to some degree even if one's intention was to resist change of any sort. Kelly's fundamental postulate that we are in the business of organizing our experiences to enable us to anticipate events reveals concern with mankind at his highest level of development, able to imagine the

implications of alternative constructions, capable of choice. Alterations, change or reordering of one's constructs need not be random. It can be directed through the role of a leader. The ramifications of Kelly's Sociality Corollary which states that "to the extent that one person construes the construction processes of another, he may play a role in a social process involving the other person," implies that through interpersonal interaction in terms of each person's understanding of the other it is possible to inspire the other person, confuse him or her, change him or her, help him or her redirect personal goals and aspirations.

More specifically, administrators' tacit or operative promotion criteria can be made more congruent with the *manifest* or *posted* criteria. A study carried out in Virginia revealed that when the leader was goal-oriented it resulted in closing the gap between the criteria of what one noticed and what one valued among his subordinates.

There is evidence (Rix and Parry, 1981; Rix, 1980; Brown, 1979) that it is possible to alter the priorities of promotion criteria, that is, to change the ways in which administrators come to think about those they would or would not promote. The kind and amount of change, however, is related to the degree of permeability of an administrator's constructs. Permeability of the system, Kelly argues, is what ultimately allows for creative growth. According to his definition, "a construct is permeable if it will admit to its range of convenience new elements which are not yet construed within its framework." Permeable constructs can show a tendency to shift slightly at different times. Often what appears as change is a shift within the same construct. In other words, because permeable constructs have resilience to new experiences and learnings, constructs tend to be stable. Changes in

promotion criteria have been explained as a *shift and sift syndrome* (Rix, 1980). The syndrome was found to have occurred during the process of developing awareness of one's own constructs and of those of others, of their variety, number, and priorities and resulting in a sorting out of the strong criteria from the weak and dropping some, the *sifting* experience, and reordering their priorities in light of their new awareness, the *shifting* experience. Concretistic terminology often gets replaced with more abstract terminology. It is related to Kelly's notion of "tight" and "loose" construing, a characteristic of permeability of an individual. Conceptualizing both "tightly" and "loosely" is a critical feature from a developmental point of view. Adding new elements to one's construct system can result in a modulation which either increases or decreases one's personal constructs. Validational experiences in workshop activities resulted in administrators with many different constructs (13, 14, 15, or 16) reducing the number of constructs and those with four or five increasing their constructs to more resemble the mean of nine. When the shift and sift syndrome results in reducing the number of constructs the ones that emerge are usually more abstract in nature (concrete constructs get "sifted out") and increasing the number of constructs from 4 or 5 to 7, 8, or 9 it was found that constructs that emerged tended to be a mixture of concrete and abstract, retaining some they already were using and adding more and different constructs. Permeability, whether tightening (decreasing) or loosening (increasing) one's constructs, appears to be crucial to one's ability to develop one's construct system. If one's construct system is impermeable, validational experiences will not be relevant for development of one's cognitive processes relating to personnel decision making. Processes of reflection and

reconstruction will be negated.

II. Alertness and Policy Making: More Possibilities and More Problems

Following the development of the administrators' operative criteria for decision making within the area of promotions, an administratively developed criterion list devised by the senior administrators became policy for a large suburban school area. It was called the Candidate Profile Form and can be seen in Table 4.

The selected criteria that became policy were the same prioritized criteria that the administrators in the study had developed. There was one difference, however. Five criteria were omitted on the Candidate Profile Form. These were leadership ability, teaching effectiveness, professional experience, age and appearance, and sex and marital status. Leadership ability, it was felt, encompassed the fifteen criteria; teaching effectiveness was not viewed by the senior administrators as an important criterion for promotion; professional experience was thought to be included within professional knowledge and growth; and age and appearance, and sex and marital status were criteria that it was felt should be omitted. In sum, the senior administrators' promotion criteria which became policy did approximate the criteria developed by the administrators.

In conducting interviews for the purpose of validating the administrators' own personal constructs, it became obvious that the Candidate Profile Form was being used. The administrators understood and agreed with the fifteen criteria. After all, they were the ones who developed it in the first place. Two distinct methods, however, of the use made of the rating scale, revealed dissimilar philosophical orientations each affecting the results of persons

TABLE 4

CANDIDATE PROFILE FORM FOR _____ _____
name

	CRITERIA	(Lowest) RATING SCALE (Highest) 1	2	3	4	5
1.	Perceptiveness & intelligence					
2.	Self-others orientation					
3.	Decision-making skills					
4.	Innovation & flexibility					
5.	Emotional stability					
6.	Human relations					
7.	Communication skills					
8.	Rapport with community					
9.	Commitment and drive					
10.	Organizing ability					
11.	Personality					
12.	Rapport with teachers					
13.	Rapport with administration					
14.	Rapport with students					
15.	Professional knowledge & growth					

Position - ACTING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Recommendation:

( ) Recommended for interview without reservation.

( ) Recommended for interview with minor reservations.

( ) Potential evident, but not recommended for interview at this time.

( ) Significant reservations, interview not recommended.

NOTE: A concise, point-form statement on the reasons for the recommendation is to be attached.

Signature _____ Date _____

NOTE: A copy of the Profile is to be sent to the Candidate.

selected and rated for a promotion. Talk during the interviews and analysis of Candidate Profile Forms revealed two camps of administrators. Some administrators emphasized traits or characteristics as ones you either have or you haven't. These persons had little difficulty illustrating the quality of these traits - they tended to rate all criteria at the high end of the rating scale - they used all 5's or a combination of 4's and 5's. The other camp of administrators emphasized the notion of personal growth and often expressed concern with rating a candidate they were recommending for promotion using 3's and maybe a 2 or a 4. Seldom did they use a 5 on the rating scale because of its implication that on that criterion one had reached one's potential or maximum capability. This, of course, was not a problem for the first group of administrators referred to, as the most commonly found numeral used was a 5. The administrators who were concerned about personal growth and development and evidence of potential in the candidates they had selected to recommend were obviously feeling stressful about the political ramifications of how the differing procedures by the administrators would be interpreted by the senior administrators ultimately responsible for the final personnel selection decision.

In promotion decisions, one's psychological dynamics is very closely related to one's philosophical orientation. Those who spoke of a potential for growth and its importance as a necessary aspect for one in a leadership role were administrators who themselves were using the mean number of constructs or were above the mean. The observance of the need for growth and/or the recognition of the potential for growth seems closely related to the use of many interpersonal perceptions. In other words, the greater the number of constructs an administrator has, the more likely is he or she to

believe in the importance of the potential for growth as a necessary characteristic in selecting a person for promotion.

Towards Fairer and More Valid Promotion Decisions

In this and other studies a process for developing administrators' personal constructs has been outlined. Several studies support the view that this kind of alertness and familiarity with one's and other's constructs could assist in accomplishing fairer and more valid promotion decisions. Salmon, in Bannister (1970) discusses works by Morse (1966) which suggests that individuals may pass through stages or categories in the course of development. In the first stage one tends to view significant others along the same dimensions with which they defined themselves. In the second stage although using the same dimensions to construe themselves and important other people, tend to view the latter as being at the opposite poles as themselves. In the final stage one tends to use different dimensions altogether for defining themselves and other significant people.

Studies of Little (1968) suggest a general trend in developing constructions of other people, from highly concrete, physicalistic constructs, to abstract truly psychological ones. Harrison (1966) in discussing his findings during group work/workshops illustrated that interpersonal concepts change in the direction of greater complexity, greater abstractness, and greater depth. Rix (1980) in "Understanding Changing Promotion Criteria Through Understanding Personal Constructs" gives further support to Harrison's finding. Works by Adams - Webber (1969) reveal the need for workshops or professional development activities for the purpose of personal construct alertness for his studies reveal that "relatively cognitively

complex persons tend to be more accurate in their perceptions of other people than do relatively cognitively simple persons." From a construct point of view the most significant issue in promotion decisions lies in the ramifications for the senior administrator(s) directing his or her subordinates in making promotion recommendations. In the Kellian model what becomes vital is the leader's ability to grasp the other's personal frame of reference as a basis for effective communication and understanding. Specifically, Kelly's (1955) Sociality Corollary states that "To the extent that one person construes the construction processes of another, he may play a role in a social process involving the other." It follows that development entails increasing one's skills in inferring the specific personal constructs of others. For a leader, if he or she has the ability then if one is oriented towards specific goals such as developing specific criteria for promotion decisions among the administrators, it is possible and even likely that alterations or change would be evident. As earlier discussed, amount of change would be directly related to the permeability of the administrators' construct systems.

One final point not to be overlooked is the importance of discussion encouraged by the leader/senior administrator of the emerging operative criteria - "These represent the *are's*; do we agree they should be the *ought's*?" Discussion of this sort, refines, extends, expands, and is likely to be a major contributing factor in fairer and more valid promotion decisions.